

Sigmund Freud: Scientific Trailblazer or Huckster?

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Sigmund (Sigmund) Schlomo Freud (1856-1939) has been rated as the sixth-most-influential scientist in world history.^[1] Medical historian Elizabeth M. Thornton writes: “Probably no single individual has had a more profound effect on 20th-century thought than Sigmund Freud.”^[2] This article examines whether Freud deserves such notoriety—or perhaps its opposite.

Early Years and Ambition

Sigmund Freud was born May 6, 1856 at Freiberg in Moravia. As early as 1872, Freud used the signature Sigmund for his first name, and he never used his middle name. Although not religious, Freud insisted that he never lost his feeling of solidarity with the Jewish people. Freud’s Jewish identity was never in question, and he repeatedly acknowledged it publicly.^[3]

Freud moved to an overcrowded Jewish quarter in Vienna at Age Four. Freud’s parents both agreed that Sigmund was exceptional and encouraged his future greatness in every possible way. He was the only member of his family to have the use of his own room for privacy and study. Freud occupied this room until he moved to hospital quarters in his 20s.^[4]

Freud at Age Nine enrolled at the newly established Sperl *Gymnasium* in Leopoldstadt, one year ahead of the normal entrance age. Freud was commended for his outstanding academic work as well as for his exemplary conduct at the school. He showed great talent for language and literature, mastering Latin, Greek, French, English, and later Spanish and Italian. Freud wrote that he was at the top of his class for seven years.^[5]

Freud from an early age had a passionate desire to achieve fame, to become a great man, and to be, in his own words, a “hero.” Freud relied on his powerful linguistic skills to create his heroic self. The young boy who had lived in the world of books became a masterful stylist, capable of presenting his ideas in compelling prose. He lived most intensely when he was writing. Freud used his literary skills to shape his personal legend as well as the history of the psychoanalytic movement.^[6]

Frederick Crews summarizes the purpose of Freud’s writings:

The aim isn’t to solve a problem but to put Freud himself in the most favorable light, either as a seasoned inquirer, a recognized associate of a leading figure, or a discoverer who will soon reveal an important truth. In his drive to become famous for something, Freud saw himself falling behind the most creative and rigorous thinkers in his field. His only recourse was to attach himself sycophantically to great reputations and then to undermine them, leaving himself positioned as our sole guide to a wiser course.^[7]

As early as 1885, before Freud had done any work of real prominence, he was already concerned with obscuring the details of his life. He wrote to his future wife, Martha Bernays: “I have destroyed all my notes of the past 14 years, as well as letters, scientific excerpts, and the manuscripts of my papers...As for the biographers, let them worry, we have no desire to make it easy for them. Each one of them will be right in his opinion of ‘The Development of the Hero,’ and I am already looking forward to seeing

them go astray.” Freud conducted several later purges of his papers and, toward the end of his life, attempted to destroy important letters written in the years of his self-analysis.[\[8\]](#)

Medical Doctor

Freud moved into quarters at the Vienna General Hospital in 1882 and spent the next three years acquiring medical experience. His training at the general hospital was the equivalent of what would today be called a medical internship and residency. He acquired familiarity with different conditions and treatment methods in surgery, internal medicine, dermatology, ophthalmology, psychiatry and nervous disorders.[\[9\]](#)

Freud opened his medical practice as a neurologist treating mentally disturbed patients on Easter Sunday in 1886. His new medical practice grew very slowly.[\[10\]](#) Freud’s concern with the financial status of his patients dominated during his first years of practice. This led him to accept patients he should have referred to other doctors.[\[11\]](#)

For example, Hugo Thimig, a well-known local actor, contacted Freud in May 1886 complaining of dysfunction and pain in his wrist. Instead of referring Thimig to a qualified orthopedic surgeon, Freud applied his scalpel to Thimig’s wrist despite his lack of surgical skill. Predictably, the operation was unsuccessful. Freud had overridden normal medical precautions, and placed Thimig’s health in needless jeopardy.[\[12\]](#)

Like other physicians of his time, Freud relied on pain-deadening drugs to treat both ordinary anxiety and a number of other conditions. What distinguished Freud from most of his fellow doctors was the use of cocaine as his panacea of choice. Neither the disastrous results of the use of cocaine to attempt to treat his friend Ernst Fleischl von Marxow nor the warnings appearing in the medical press deterred Freud from continuing to medicate his patients with cocaine.[\[13\]](#)

Freud used cocaine for a wide variety of conditions. For example, Freud injected cocaine directly into the affected site of a sciatica patient over an 11-day period. The patient became euphoric, and Freud predictably declared the man cured. However, we know for certain that cocaine does not cure sciatica. Freud spared himself any unpleasant surprises regarding side effects, addiction, or relapses from the treatment, and continued to treat his patients with cocaine for numerous illnesses and disorders.[\[14\]](#)

The most-fundamental defect in Freud’s medical practice, however, was not his choice of improper remedies; it was his inability to make correct diagnoses. Freud’s inclination was to diagnose the patient with whatever ailment was preoccupying Freud at that moment. From 1887 into the 1890s, his choice was usually hysteria. Even when a patient was subsequently shown to have an organic disease, Freud still maintained that hysteria was part of the clinical picture.[\[15\]](#)

Psychoanalysis

Freud emerged as the world’s first psychoanalyst with the publication of his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* on November 4, 1899. He published three of the fundamental texts of psychoanalysis between 1900 and 1905: *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). Freud also published numerous case histories, papers and essays on a variety of clinical and nonclinical subjects,

and in 1913 published *Totem and Taboo*, which was his first major application of psychoanalysis to another discipline—in this case, anthropology.[\[16\]](#)

The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, which is probably Freud's most-popular and accessible book, introduced to the world the concept of the Freudian slip. A Freudian slip, also called parapraxis, includes slips of the tongue (using a different word for the one intended), slips of the pen, misreading, and mishearing. Freud accepted physical elements as capable of facilitating a parapraxis, but not as causing one. Freud concluded this book by making the connection among dreams, neuroses, and parapraxes explicit, and by stating that we are "all a little neurotic."[\[17\]](#)

Freud's book *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* is primarily concerned with the sexual instinct, which he called libido and viewed as a basic biological need like hunger. He later evolved the concept of the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex was defined as a child's feelings of desire for his or her opposite-sex parent and jealousy and anger toward his or her same-sex parent. Freud came to present this childhood neurosis as the rule, not the exception.[\[18\]](#)

Freud said to his friend Wilhelm Fliess that sexuality is "the key that unlocks everything." He acknowledged, however, that he was pretty much alone in his thinking. Freud stated that his colleagues looked upon him as pretty much of a monomaniac, although he had the distinct feeling that he had touched upon one of the great secrets of nature. Freud was basing his conclusions primarily on his moods and intuition rather than verifiable clinical data.[\[19\]](#)

Freud's use of moods and intuition forged psychoanalysis into the artful milieu of an ambiguous science. Freud said to his American pupil Smiley Blanton: "In developing a new science, one has to make its theories vague. You cannot make things clear-cut." In psychoanalysis, Freud had developed an interpretive free-for-all that was safely detached from testable propositions.[\[20\]](#)

Psychoanalytic Movement

Freud's books and lectures began to attract the attention of a small group of physicians and intellectuals in Vienna. Beginning in the early 1900s, they came to Freud's office on Wednesday evenings for discussions of psychoanalysis. This "Wednesday Society" generated lively discussions in which all members participated. The Wednesday Society by 1906 had grown to almost 20 members, almost all of them Jewish, about 12 of whom attended on any given evening.[\[21\]](#)

Freud also attracted visitors from other cities. One of them was Carl Jung, a young psychiatrist on the staff of a hospital in Zurich, Switzerland, where he was the assistant to the renowned schizophrenia expert Eugen Bleuler. Jung came to Vienna in 1907 and was greatly impressed with Freud's stature and brilliance. Bringing in Jung and his colleagues in Zurich was important to Freud because they were all Gentiles, and carried the prestige of official psychiatry.[\[22\]](#)

Freud was concerned that psychoanalysis not be branded as a purely Jewish science. Jung was extremely important to Freud because Jung provided a bridge to the Gentile world. Because Jung was a Gentile, Jung was the only important member of the early group of psychoanalysts whom Freud thought could command respect from the outside world.[\[23\]](#)

The Wednesday Society was renamed the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1908. With contacts in Europe and America, 42 psychoanalysts attended its first international meeting in Salzburg, Austria.

Freud's creative accomplishments in psychoanalysis had opened up a new world of understanding and therapy. However, Freud's intolerance for the ideas of others soon erupted in internal battles with his colleagues. [24]

Freud had formed the Vienna Society as a forum to discuss his ideas. Freud was sympathetic to new ideas only if he could appropriate them into his existing theories. Alfred Adler had worked within the society from its inception, but as Adler developed his own ideas, Freud forced him to leave. Freud wrote to Carl Jung: "Rather tired after battle and victory, I hereby inform you that yesterday I forced the whole Adler gang to resign from the society." [25]

When Jung published a book that raised questions about Freud's theory of sexuality, Freud again became intolerant and set loose forces that would destroy their friendship. Freud labeled Jung's ideas as "abnormality" and "illness," and wrote to Jung that "we abandon our personal relations entirely." Jung accepted Freud's proposal, and Jung was forced out as president of the International Psychoanalytic Association. Not content to attack Jung solely in his private correspondence, Freud published books in which he dismissed Jung's original contributions as "fairy tales" and "occultism." [26]

World War I seemed to validate Freud's vision of man as an irrational, emotion- and subconscious-driven creature. Psychoanalysis as an intellectual movement and method of treatment became increasingly influential throughout the world. However, Freud continued to demand unwavering adherence to his doctrines, and associates who expressed their own ideas soon ran afoul of him. Ultimately, his daughter Anna Freud became his most loyal and devoted disciple. [27]

Jewish Invention

Freud was in effect the scion of a traditional Hasidic Jewish environment. His invention of psychoanalysis can be viewed as originating from Jewish traditions and complexes. For example, Freud never had the courage to reveal to the world that his famous Oedipus Complex was in reality a characteristic Jewish complex. As a good Jew, Freud projected the neuroses of Judaism onto the rest of humanity, using a Greek legend to facilitate acceptance by the goyim of his "discovery." [28]

David Bakan writes: "The basic criticism against the doctrine of the Oedipus Complex is that it is modeled along the lines of the particular type of family constellation to be found in Freud's legacy culture. It is claimed that Freud committed the fallacy of ethnocentrism, that he overgeneralized on the basis of a particular culture." [29] As Bakan implies, Freud's Oedipus Complex is in reality a Jewish specificity. [30]

David Bakan also demonstrates that psychoanalysis is largely derived from the methods of the Jewish Kabbalah and the Talmud. He writes, for example, that the fundamental principles of dream interpretation used by Freud are already present in the Talmud. Freud virtually said that in psychoanalysis, he was analyzing a human being just as the Jews had analyzed the Torah for centuries. [31]

Emmanuel Ratier has stressed Freud's membership in the Masonic sect of B'nai B'rith, a branch of Freemasonry reserved exclusively for Jews. From 1900 to 1902, Freud participated as a founder in the creation of the second Lodge of B'nai B'rith of Vienna, the Harmony Lodge. [32]

Yosef Yerushalmi writes that Freud's psychoanalysis was a Jewish science:

History made psychoanalysis a “Jewish science.” It continued to be attacked as such. It was destroyed in Germany, Italy, and Austria and exiled to the four winds, as such. It continues even now to be perceived as such by enemies and friends alike. Of course there are by now distinguished analysts who are not Jews...But the vanguard of the movement over the last 50 years has remained predominantly Jewish, as it was from the beginning. [33]

Dr. Kevin MacDonald writes:

The obvious racialism and the clear statement of Jewish ethical, spiritual, and intellectual superiority contained in Freud’s last work, Moses and Monotheism, must be seen not as an aberration of Freud’s thinking but as central to his attitudes...I noted that prior to the rise of Nazism an important set of Jewish intellectuals had a strong racial sense of Jewish peoplehood and felt racial estrangement from gentiles; they also made statements that can only be interpreted as indicating a sense of Jewish racial superiority. The psychoanalytic movement was an important example of these tendencies. It was characterized by ideas of Jewish intellectual superiority, racial consciousness, national pride, and Jewish solidarity. [34]

Conclusion

Sigmund Freud was a scientific fraud. American attorney and political commentator Ben Shapiro writes:

The first serious advocate of the position that human beings were no longer rational, free actors came from Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Freud was a charlatan, a phenomenal publicist but a devastatingly terrible practicing psychologist. He was a quack who routinely prescribed measures damaging to patients, then wrote fictional papers bragging about his phenomenal results. In one 1896 lecture, he claimed that by uncovering childhood sexual trauma he had healed some 18 patients; he later admitted he hadn’t cured anyone. Freud himself stated, “I am actually not at all a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter, not a thinker. I am by temperament nothing but a conquistador—an adventurer, if you want it translated—with all the curiosity, daring and tenacity characteristic of a man of this sort.” [35]

Dr. David Duke writes that a major portion of a Philosophy 101 course he took at Louisiana State University centered on Sigmund Freud. Duke aptly states: “I liked to call him Sigmund *Fraud*.” [36]

Notes

[1] http://www.adherents.com/people/100_scientists.html.

[2] Thornton, E. M., *The Freudian Fallacy: An Alternative View of Freudian Theory*, Garden City, N.Y.: The Dial Press, 1984, p. ix.

[3] Noland, Richard W., *Sigmund Freud Revisited*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999, pp. 1-2.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

[5] Breger, Louis, *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000, p. 30.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

[7] Crews, Frederick, *Freud: The Making of an Illusion*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017, p. 235.

- [8] Breger, Louis, *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000, p. 1.
- [9] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-64.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- [11] Crews, Frederick, *Freud: The Making of an Illusion*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017, pp. 242, 248-249.
- [12] *Ibid.*, pp. 248-249.
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 251.
- [15] *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.
- [16] Noland, Richard W., *Sigmund Freud Revisited*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999, p. 39.
- [17] *Ibid.*, pp. 50-54.
- [18] *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 70-71.
- [19] Crews, Frederick, *Freud: The Making of an Illusion*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017, p. 452.
- [20] *Ibid.*, p. 451.
- [21] Breger, Louis, *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000, pp. 173-174.
- [22] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- [23] Bakan, David, *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, New York: Schocken Books, 1965, p. 122.
- [24] Breger, Louis, *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000, pp. 179, 193.
- [25] *Ibid.*, pp. 194, 203-204.
- [26] *Ibid.*, pp. 208, 217, 230.
- [27] *Ibid.*, pp. 269, 288, 299.
- [28] Ryssen, Herve, *Psychoanalysis of Judaism*, White Plains, Md.: The Barnes Review, 2019, p. 389.
- [29] Bakan, David, *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, New York: Schocken Books, 1965, p. 275.
- [30] Ryssen, Herve, *Psychoanalysis of Judaism*, White Plains, Md.: The Barnes Review, 2019, p. 390.
- [31] Bakan, David, *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, New York: Schocken Books, 1965, pp. 251, 258.
- [32] Ryssen, Herve, *Psychoanalysis of Judaism*, White Plains, Md.: The Barnes Review, 2019, p. 392.

[33] Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 98.

[34] MacDonald, Kevin, *The Culture of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements*, Long Beach, Cal.: 2002, pp. 108-109.

[35] Shapiro, Ben, *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great*, New York: Broadside Books, 2019, p. 166.

[36] Duke, David, *My Awakening: A Path to Racial Understanding*, Mandeville, La.: Free Speech Press, 1999, p. 494.

Author(s):	John Wear
Title:	Sigmund Freud: Scientific Trailblazer or Huckster?
Sources:	
Dates:	published: 2020-02-09, first posted: 2020-02-09 21:13:07

<http://inconvenienthistory.com/12/1/7173>